

Message Text

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TAGS: PGOV, CA
SUBJECT: TRUDEAU'S CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS FAIL TO EXCITE
QUEBECOIS

SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU'S CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS
HAVE STRUCK FEW SPARKS HERE SINCE THEY WERE ANNOUNCED EARLY
THIS WEEK. THE GENERAL REACTION HAS BEEN TO TEND TO DISCOUNT
THE PROPOSALS AS A PRE ELECTORAL MANEUVER -- PEQUISTES ARE
CITING THE TRUDEAU TEXT AS YET FURTHER PROOF THAT THE FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT IS UNWILLING TO MAKE A MEANINGFUL ACCOMODATION
WITH THE ASPIRATIONS OF QUEBECOIS, WHILE FEDERALISTS HERE ARE
DISAPPOINTED THAT TRUDEAU HAS FAILED TO PRODUCE THE SORT OF
IMAGINATIVE PROPOSALS FOR CONSTITUTIOANL CHANGE NECESSARY FOR
THE PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL UNITY.

1. TO NOBODY'S SURPRISE, RENE LEVESQUE DISMISSED TRUDEAU'S
CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS AS "PROFOUNDLY INSIGNIFICANT," "A
MOUNTAIN GIVING BIRTH TO A MOUSE, AND A STILL BORN MOUSE AT
THAT." LEVESQUE REJECTED THE PROPOSALS AS A BASIS FOR DIS-
CUSSION AT THIS FALL'S FEDERAL PROVINCIAL PRIME MINISTER'S
CONFERENCE, AND THREATENED TO BOYCOTT THE CONFERENCE ENTIRELY
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(HE LATER BACKED OFF SOMEWHAT AND SAID HE MIGHT ATTEND THE
CONFERENCE IF ONLY TO EXPLAIN QUEBEC'S SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION PLAN).
INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS MINISTER CLAUDE MORIN SAID THE TRUDEAU
TEXT
CONTAINED NOTHING NEW AND IN FACT CONSTITUTED A STEP BACKWARD FROM
THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS AT THE VICTORIA CONFERENCE,

PROPOSALS WHICH HAD BEEN REJECTED AT THE TIME BY QUEBEC'S LIBERAL REGIME. MORIN DERIDED THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S INABILITY TO DEMONSTRATE ANY SIGN OF ORIGINALITY OR CREATIVITY AT A TIME WHEN CANADA WAS GOING THROUGH AN UNPRECEDENTED PERIOD OF CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS.

2. REACTION FROM THE PROVINCIAL LIBERALS WAS ALSO UNENTHUSIASTIC. IN A MAJOR SPEECH AT TROIS RIVIERES, CLAUDE RYAN SAID THAT HE HAD "SERIOUS RESERVATIONS" ABOUT THE FEDERAL PROPOSAL. HE OPPOSED AS "UNTHINKABLE" ANY UNILATERAL CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, AND DECLARED IT ESSENTIAL THAT THE GENERAL AGREEMENT OF ALL THE PROVINCES, PARTICULARLY ONTARIO AND QUEBEC, BE OBTAINED BEFOREHAND. CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE MUST COME ABOUT NOT JUST IN CONSULTATION BUT IN FULL COLLABORATION WITH THE PROVINCES, RYAN SAID, EVEN IN AREAS WHICH ARE PRESENTLY EXCLUSIVELY THE JURISDICTION OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. HE ADDED THAT HE WAS DISTURBED BY THE FACT THAT THE TRUDEAU TEXT LAID OUT A TIME-TABLE AND AN AGENDA FOR CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE THAT MAY NOT SUIT THE PROVINCES. THE QUESTION OF AN AGENDA, HE SAID, MUST BE DISCUSSED BEFOREHAND WITH THE PROVINCES. WHILE HE AVOIDED ANY MENTION OF SPECIAL STATUS FOR QUEBEC, RYAN DID MANAGE TO SUGGEST A CERTAIN SURPRISE THAT QUEBEC WAS NOT MENTIONED AT ALL IN THE TRUDEAU TEXT, AND INSISTED THAT ANY CONSTITUTIONAL SOLUTION MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT "THE QUEBEC SPECIFICITY." RYAN RECOGNIZED THAT THERE WAS MERIT IN CERTAIN OF THE FEDERAL PROPOSALS, PARTICULARLY THE TWO PRECONDITIONS SET BY OTTAWA FOR CONSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL -- MAINTENANCE OF THE FEDERAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LINK AND THE INCLUSION IN THE CONSTITUTION OF BILL OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES -- AND HE APPLAUDED OTTAWA'S "EXPLICIT RECOGNITION THAT AN IN DEPTH RENEWAL OF THE CANADIAN CONSTITUTION IS NECESSARY. RYAN THEN TURNED HIS FIRE ON THE PQ, CONDEMNING THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT FOR ITS KNEE-JERK REACTION TO TRUDEAU'S PROPOSAL AND FOR ITS "UNILATERALISM" IN REJECTING ANY PROPOSAL THAT WASN'T IN EXACT CONFORMITY WITH ITS OWN CONSTITUTIONAL OPTION.

3. AS FOR THE UNION NATIONALE, IT WAS ATTEMPTING, WITH NOTABLE LACK OF SUCCESS, TO STAKE OUT A MIDDLE GROUND FOR ITSELF. PARTY LEADER RODRIGUE BIRON INITIALLY CONDEMNED THE TRUDEAU PROPOSALS AS PUFFERY, THEN SHIFTED GEARS ANNOUNCING THAT THE UN WOULD RESERVE COMMENT UNTIL IT HAD HAD A CHANCE TO STUDY THE PROPOSALS MORE FULLY. IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY YESTERDAY BIRON PROPOSED A MOTION REQUIRING THAT ANY CONSTITUTIONAL DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND QUEBEC PROCEED ONLY AFTER MUTUAL AGREEMENT THAT

A DEVOLUTION OF FEDERAL POWERS TO THE PROVINCES AND LIMITS ON THE SPENDING POWERS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WERE TO BE NEGOTIATED. THIS MOTION, WHICH UNDER PARLIAMENTARY RULES WOULD HAVE TO PASS UNANIMOUSLY AND WITHOUT DEBATE WAS OPPOSED BY THE LIBERALS ON THE GROUNDS THAT "NO PARLIAMENT IN THE WORLD COULD ADOPT WITHOUT DISCUSSION A MOTION INVOLVING SO MANY FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES." BIRON THEN RETIRED IN CONFUSION.

4. COMMENT : WHILE THE IMMEDIATE PQ REJECTION OF THE TRUDEAU PROPOSALS WAS PRO FORMA AND ENTIRELY PREDICTABLE, THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT

THAT PESQUISTES WILL TRY TO MAKE POLITICAL HAY BE DENOUNCING OTTAWA'S ALLEGED FAILURE TO COME UP WITH ANYTHING MORE THAN "COSMETIC" PROPOSALS AS PROOF POSITIVE THAT IN ITS HEART THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WANTS ONLY TO RETAIN THE STATUS QUO. WHETHER OR NOT THIS LINE OF ATTACK WILL ENJOY WIDE SUCCESS REMAINS TO BE SEEN, BUT WE SENSE A CERTAIN "HO HUM" ATTITUDE AMONG FEDERALISTS AND UNDECIDEDS, TINGED WITH DISAPPOINTMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT THE TRUDEAU PROPOSALS WERE NOT MORE MEATY. THE GENERAL FEELING HERE SEEMS TO BE THAT SINCE THERE IS NO GOVERNMENT IN QUEBEC WITH WHICH HE CAN DEAL ON CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES, TRUDEAU IS SIMPLY PLAYING PRE ELECTORAL POLITICS. MCNAMARA

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